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Nigeria's New Federal Structure

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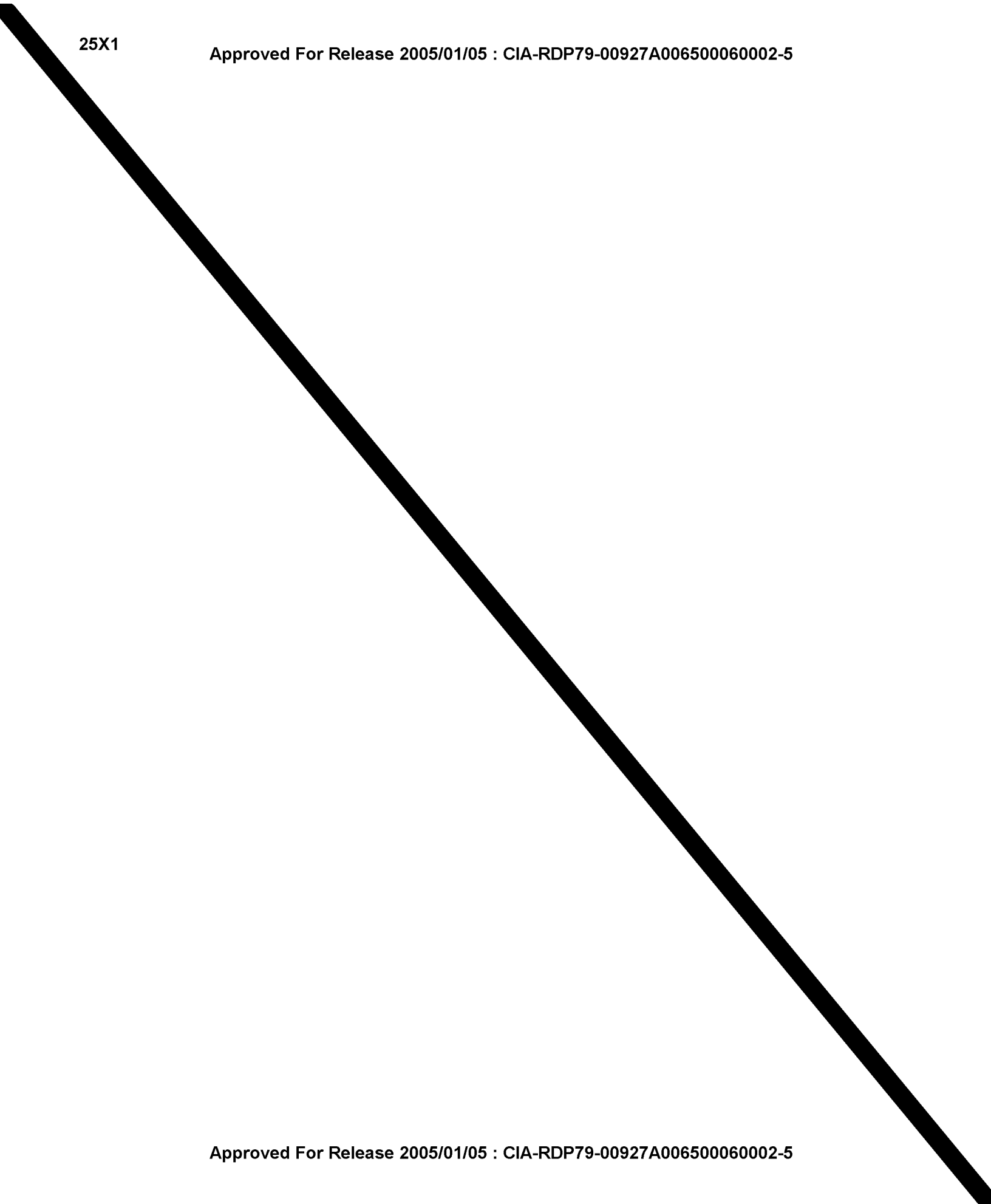

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NIGERIA'S NEW FEDERAL STRUCTURE

The Federation of Nigeria, beset by civil war with the secessionist Ibos from Eastern Nigeria, is nevertheless taking steps to strengthen national unity in the postwar period. Federal leader Gowon split the former four regions into 12 states on 1 April 1968 in a move to solve the critical problem of intertribal strife among Nigeria's three major tribes--Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Ibo--and their domination of some 250 minority tribes.

The Federal Military Government is made up largely of relatively young and politically inexperienced men from the northern minority areas who are acting in concert with tribal leaders from most parts of the country. Gowon and his fellow minority tribesmen in the federal government believe that the 12-state structure will dilute the power of the major tribes and broaden popular participation in government. This, they expect, will take a long time and will require the firm hand of the military to prevent the civilian politicians from disrupting their plan.

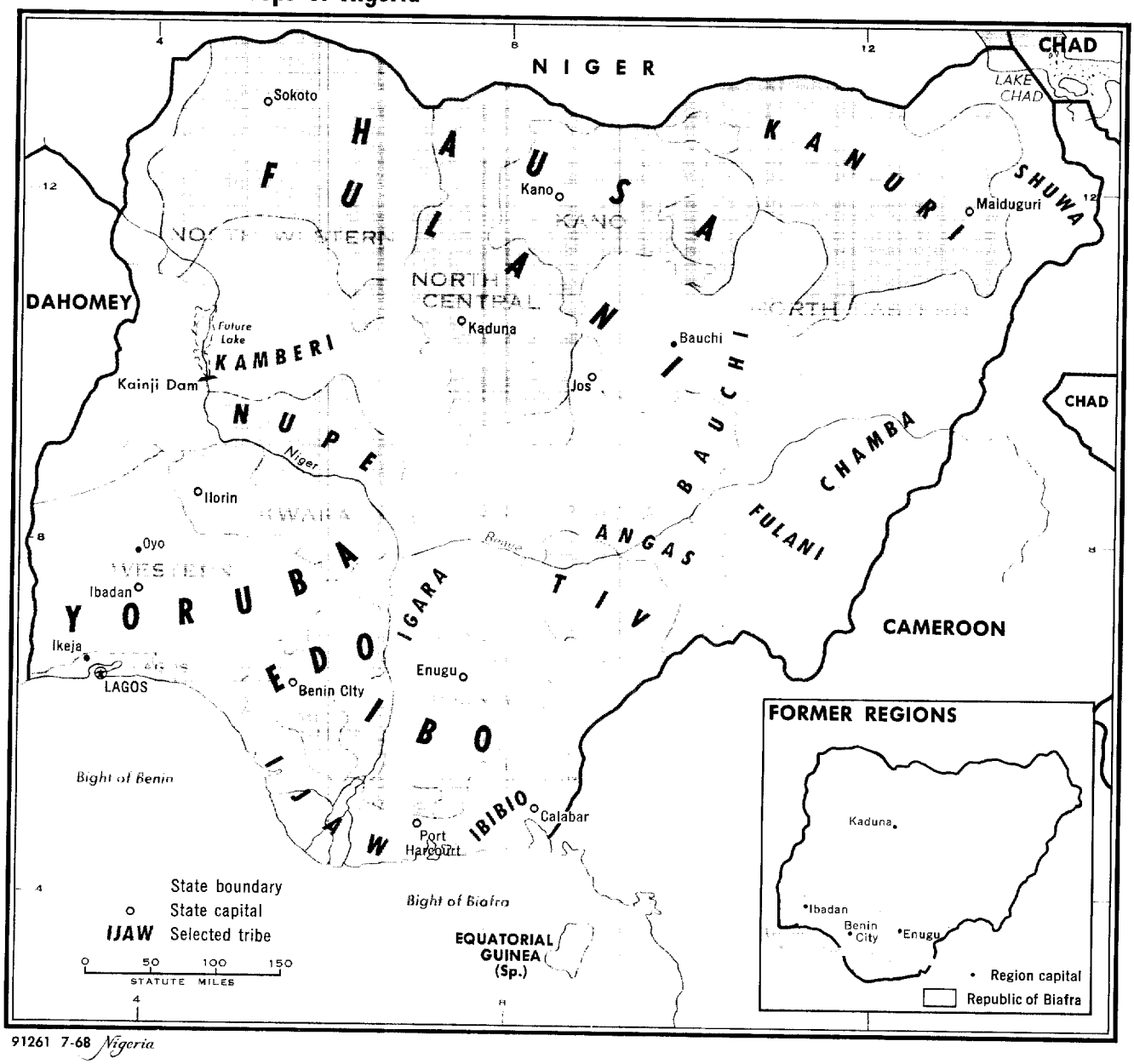
The new states, especially the six in the north, have many problems. Strong intertribal frictions that have come to the surface may result in further territorial splits or realignments. The state governments also have immense staffing problems, as well as inadequate finances. Nevertheless, most of the states are beginning to function in the basic areas of government, and the relatively well-qualified federal civil service is keeping the country as a whole running despite the civil war.

Background

When soldiers replaced Nigeria's civilian leaders in January 1966, the country's federal structure was based on four regional units, each of which possessed a great deal of political and economic autonomy. A single tribe dominated each of three of the four regions: Hausa/Fulani in the North, Yoruba in the West, and Ibo in the East. (The Mid-Western Region, split off from the West in 1963, contained several tribes, none of which constituted a majority.)

Federal power, which had grown in the years since independence, has become an object of increasing contention among

States and Tribal Groups of Nigeria



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the three major tribes. The military coup in January 1966, the countercoup in July 1966, and the Ibo secession in May 1967 were all primarily reactions by one tribal group against the attempts of another to dominate the country as a whole. The coup of July 1966 was also a reaction against the attempts of the Ibo-dominated first military regime to strengthen federal power at the expense of the regions.

The present Federal Military Government (FMG), which took power in August 1966, has basically continued to work within the framework of the Nigerian Constitution, altering it as necessary by decree in the absence of the civilian political institutions suspended following the first coup. In late 1966 and early 1967, representatives of the four regions met several times in an attempt to devise a new formula for the relationships between the regions and the federal government. During these discussions, considerable support was evidenced, especially from the newly powerful spokesmen for the minority tribes, for dividing the four regions into a larger number of states.

The unwillingness of the Ibo leaders of the former Eastern Region to permit the east to be split kept these meetings from reaching any workable conclusions. When federal leader Gowon took matters into his own hands on 27 May 1967 and created by decree 12 states in place of the four regions, the east seceded as the "Republic of Biafra," thereby capping a series of moves it had already made toward greater autonomy.

Gowon's action was influenced by his own origins as a minority tribesman from the north, and by strong pressures from the minority tribal elements which predominate in the army. Along with other important leaders in the FMG who are from minority tribes in both the north and south, Gowon believed that Nigeria's political problems would be alleviated by reducing the power of the three largest tribes, which under the new system theoretically could no longer dominate one large and powerful region but would have to work through several weaker states.

The Present Central Authority

At the center of Nigeria's federal structure is the Supreme Military Council (SMC), composed of the top military and police officers and the military governors of each of the states, except for the East-Central State--i.e., the Ibo heartland--whose governor has not yet been appointed. This group is headed by Major General Yakubu Gowon, who is officially styled as "Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces and Head of the Federal Military Government". Assisting the SMC in running the country is the Federal Executive Council (FEC), on which sit some of the top military leaders, including Gowon as chairman, about a dozen civilian commissioners, the two top police officials, and the attorney general.

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The commissioners function as heads of the government ministries and were brought into the FMG primarily to broaden popular support for the regime and give it a civilian flavor. All major policy decisions, however, have to be referred for approval to the SMC, which thereby maintains a checkrein on executive council actions. Few of the civilian commissioners are providing any real leadership to their ministries, which are largely functioning under the direction of a group of fairly experienced and competent civil servants. Many of the commissioners are actively seeking to further their political careers for the time when the country is returned to civilian rule.

The military regime also is too preoccupied with the war to give much positive guidance or attention to the myriad other problems that have arisen during the past year. Although government administration is frequently slow-moving and many problems seem to be ignored, basic government services have continued.

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Administering the New States

The 12-state federal structure officially took effect on 1 April 1968, by which time 10 of the 12 states had set up functioning administrations. Of the three eastern states, only the South-Eastern State is fully under federal control. The federal army still retains basic control there, although the governor now is operating from Calabar, the capital. Rivers State also has a governor, and its capital has been occupied by the federal army, which is slowly proceeding to occupy the rest of the state. When this process is completed, the Rivers State governor will probably move to establish his administration in Port Harcourt. Even though Enugu, the East-Central State capital, is occupied by the federal army, most of the state is not. The future status of the Ibo homeland and its relationship to the rest of Nigeria must await the end of the civil war.

Two of the 12 states in the south had functioning administrations well before 1 April. The Western State has simply converted its former regional structure, although it lost considerable territory and some administrative elements to Lagos State. In late 1967, the Mid-Western State reconstituted its regional administrative structure, which had been disrupted by the Biafran conquest of the state and the federal reoccupation the preceding summer and fall.

Following Gowon's decree of May 1967 creating the 12 states, an interim administrative council was set up in the Northern region to oversee the apportionment of

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the region's administrative structure and assets among the six new states. The Northern region governor, Brigadier Hassan Katsina, was appointed head of the council, which proceeded slowly to accomplish its tasks during the next year. On 1 April 1968, the council was terminated and residual matters of joint interest were assigned to an Interim Common Services Agency which will administer a number of organizations serving the six states. These include the higher educational institutions, radio and television, the Northern Nigeria Marketing Board, and several less important functions difficult to split six ways. A significant feature of the new agency is that disputes between it and a state government will be referred to the Head of the FMG for compulsory arbitration.

Many southerners have tended to view the Common Services Agency as a device for maintaining northern solidarity. Other evidence, however, indicates that it will take a more powerful organization than the limited Common Services Agency to withstand the centrifugal forces in the north. The Benue-Plateau governor, for example, has refused to accept the agency's jurisdiction over the minor matter of automobile licensing and reportedly intends to set up his own marketing board.

The number of ministries in each of the six northern states has been reduced to seven, both because the Common Services Agency has assumed some of the ministerial functions of the former region and because there are not enough civil servants to go around. In the other states, either the existing regional structure was carried over or a new one created along similar lines. In addition, in the north generally more civilian ministers--actually called commissioners--have been appointed than there are ministries. This undoubtedly is an attempt by the military governors to strengthen their political positions by bringing politically important personages into their administrations.

Staffing the state administrations in the north has become both a political and a tribal problem. Some of the states have already adopted states' rights positions and are fostering state "nationalism." In some instances, there have been public demonstrations, largely tribal in character, against nonindigenous civil employees and businessmen. Although most governors put their need for qualified personnel ahead of tribal considerations and have discouraged this activity, there undoubtedly will continue to be local outbreaks of intertribal friction, any one of which could erupt into violence and threaten the security of a wider area. The Tiv tribe, in particular, has a long history of periodic outbreaks of violence stemming from an ingrained resistance to any external domination.

The relative youth and political inexperience of the six northern governors and the two so far appointed for the three eastern states is a weakness in the new federal structure. The Benue-Plateau governor seems to be taking

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25X6 hold firmly, but the Kano governor is [redacted] probably strongly influenced by civilian politicians in Kano, as well as by the powerful Emir of Kano. The two minority state governors in the east face perhaps the most difficult task of all. The need for massive rehabilitation and reconstruction is matched by the intense tribal hatreds exacerbated by atrocities committed on all sides during the civil war.

Animosity Among the Tribes

Although the federation's open warfare with the Ibos would seem to be a warning to the rest of Nigeria of the consequences of tribal strife, frictions between tribes and even within tribes continue to plague the state and federal governments. The Yoruba tribesmen resident in the north, in particular, have been the object of open hostility on the part of the conservative, far northern Hausa/Fulani ever since the Yorubas moved into jobs and occupations abandoned by Ibos driven out of the Northern region in 1966. There have been numerous anti-Yoruba incidents, and in recent months a number of Yorubas have returned south. More violent anti-Yoruba outbreaks seem likely.

Behind these activities are a number of influential former political leaders of the abolished Northern People's Congress (NPC). Such men as Inuwa Wada, former federal minister of defense, resent the accession to power of minority peoples they once dominated, and they continue to seek the return to national power of the conservative, Muslim Hausa/Fulani tribe. Should these conservative former NPC leaders fail to regain political power on the national level or if they feel unable to live with social and democratic reforms being made elsewhere in the north they might well resort, perhaps in alliance with some of the emirs of the "Holy North," to extreme measures. These might even include an attempt to take the far north out of the federation.

The Yorubas, dwelling in the Western, Kwara, and Lagos states, are themselves badly split, basically along tribal clan lines, but also according to their adherence to one of two former political parties, the Action Group (AG) or the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). The AG adherents, led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who is vice chairman of the Federal Executive Council and the federal minister of finance, prefer a united Yorubaland. On the other hand, the traditional foes of the AG, including some important clan leaders, desire their own state. Under further impetus from tribal leaders outside the west who still fear Yoruba political power, the creation of an NNDP-dominated Yoruba state from a part of the Western State is a strong possibility.

The six northern states present a vast complexity of intertribal tensions. The Kanuri tribe in the North-Eastern State

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has long wanted a state of its own, and is unhappy at having to share one with others. The Tivs of Benue-Plateau do not get along very well with the tribes in the northern part of that state--or with anyone else for that matter. Several small tribes in the eastern part of Kwara resent domination by indigenous Yorubas and have already petitioned Lagos for their own state. These instances of intertribal hostilities are repeated throughout the country and are as intense in the south as in the north.

Problems and Prospects

The creation of the 12 states and the civil war are, almost paradoxically, contributing to a measure of relative political stability in important parts of Nigeria. The process of establishing a number of new state administrations and the government's concentration on the war effort have kept a number of potentially disruptive situations from arising. This period of relative calm, however, may not last long beyond the end of the civil war.

The civil war appears to have brought about an increased adherence to the concept of Nigerian unity on the part of many leaders at both federal and local levels. Indeed, the motto adopted by the FMG, "Keep Nigeria One," is constantly put before the general populace over the radio and in the newspapers. The strength of this incipient nationalism vis-a-vis the deeply imbedded tribal consciousness of nearly every Nigerian is likely to be the key to Nigeria's future as a country. Much will depend on the quality of leadership emanating from Lagos and the state capitals under the present military regime, which is determined to maintain Nigerian unity.

On the other hand, Nigeria's political and economic complexity, now increased with the 12-state structure, makes it difficult for any one group to break up the federation. Even the secession of the Ibos, a major tribal group, has not brought on the end of the Nigerian federation, and the secession seems destined for failure, at least in this round. In addition, the factor of inertia--the average Nigerian's inability to take actions that disrupt traditional patterns--helps to maintain the status quo.

Inter- and intratribal antipathies verging on open hostility will plague the new state administrations for a long time. One or more states, particularly the North-Eastern and Western, may split further to accommodate tribal pressures, and the boundaries of several states could be realigned to calm tribal animosities. Gowon himself has indicated that additional states might well be created. Few if any changes, however, are likely to take place as long as the civil war is being actively prosecuted. The army leaders have already made it clear they will tolerate no interference with the war effort. On the other hand,

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after the war is over, the thousands of soldiers who are sent home may well provide a disruptive leadership to those tribes which feel oppressed or wronged by the present 12-state structure.

A major question still to be resolved is the issue of the future balance of power between the central government and the states. Most of the new states are considerably weaker than the old regions, and the central government should be in a better position to strengthen its authority at the expense of regional and tribal interests. Many minority tribal leaders support a stronger central regime as a bulwark against domination by one of the three major tribes.

Lagos' preoccupation with the war, however, is giving the states the opportunity to establish fairly autonomous governing structures. If this trend is permitted to continue, Lagos could find it difficult to reimpose its authority. The central government, on the other hand, controls the purse strings, and most of the new states, although they collect taxes themselves, must get money from Lagos to pay for economic and social programs being demanded by the public.

A key concern of the new states is their relative share of federal revenues, an issue which played a large role in the Eastern region's move toward secession. This question will inevitably figure prominently in the constitutional discussions expected to take place after the war. At present, federally collected revenues are allocated in part according to population, which does not satisfy states such as Kano which provide a far greater proportion of revenues than they get back under this formula. This will also be true of the oil-rich states, such as Mid-Western, South-Eastern and Rivers.

In April 1967 Gowon had announced a timetable for returning the country to civilian rule by early 1969, but this has been derailed by the civil war. [redacted] 25X1

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The military believe the new state structure which they have imposed should have an initial period of consolidation under their tutelage before being subjected to the added political strains and stresses accompanying a return to civilian rule. It remains problematical, however, whether this breathing space will be sufficient to ensure the success of this new arrangement for accommodating Nigeria's complex of tribal pressures. [redacted] 25X1

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